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**The old ones and the new ones
at the court of Sultan Reşad
(in the light of the memoirs of Safiye Ünüvar,
the Harem teacher)*)**

The aim of this paper is to introduce in a broad outline the character of the reforms carried out in the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the period of modernization to the years of Sultan Reşad V, and to set this against the style of life in the Sultan's Palace described by the teacher, Miss Safiye Ünüvar, who worked in the Harem¹ during the reign of Reşad V and who compiled her memoirs in the small book entitled "My Memoirs of the Court" (*Saray Hatıralarım*). The picture of the Sultan's Harem drawn by Safiye shows the huge precipice between the very traditional and invariable environment inside the Palace and the world outside. The examples from Safiye's memoirs in the present paper will illustrate this precipice.

1. The period of reforms in the Sultanate

With the issue of the *Tanzimat Fermanı*² in 1839, the Ottoman Empire

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¹ While writing the word 'Harem' with the capital, we mean the section of the Ottoman Sultans' Palace reserved for women inhabitants: wives, concubines, female relatives, children and slaves.

² *Tanzimat Fermanı* (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerifi, Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu*) – the edict of Sultan Abdülmecid issued in 1839, which laid out the fundamental principles of the

undertook the path of reforms and modernization. The state's reformers began to modernize all the most important domains of political, economic and cultural life. The edict of Sultan Abdülmecid (1823-1861, Ottoman sultan: 1839-1861), declared for a modernization of the judicial system, the security of honor, life and property for all Ottoman subjects regardless of race or religion; and promised that modern standards would be introduced in the areas of taxation and conscription (because before then, citizens had been completely powerless and helpless in the face of the inhumane acts of tax and recruitment servants).

Sultan Abdülmecid was strongly influenced by the British ambassador, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, who helped persuade the sultan to introduce Western reforms. He also had some reliable advisers of modern views, such as Mustafa Reşit Pasha, Ali and Fuat. All the reforms of *Tanzimat* were possible thanks to the work and far-sightedness of those three politicians. During the reign of Abdülmecid wide changes and reforms were observed in the Ottoman state. One of the most important changes, clearly influencing the life of the Turkish people, was secularization in the educational system, which was very backward in relation to European schools as well as to the schools of national minorities within the Empire. Education was an area in which reforms advanced successfully. As the traditional Muslim schools did not teach technical subjects at all, biology, physics, chemistry, the government put a lot of effort into involving a new type of middle school, *rüştiye* (set up in 1838). The task of these schools was to prepare boys for studying in more advanced governmental schools of a technical, medical, law, administrative and military type.³ Also the knowledge of foreign languages left much to be desired. As McCarthy writes, "Ignorance of European languages was the main factor that held back Ottoman learning of new ways. Ottoman bureaucrats were not poor at languages; they customarily had a command of Arabic and Persian as well as of the intricacies of Ottoman Turkish, but those were not the languages they needed to know."⁴ The most successful state institution, where foreign languages

modernizing reforms. With this edict the period of broad reorganization called *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) began in the Ottoman Empire.

³ While writing "more advanced schools" we do not have in mind schools of the university type, as there were no universities in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. There were vocational schools of European grammar/high school level, set up in the second half of the 19th century, such as *Mekteb-i Ulumi Harbiye* (army-engineering), *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* (civil service), *Erkân-ı Harb* (general staff), *Mekteb-i Hukukî Şahane* (law), *Tıbbiye-i Şahane* (medical), *Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi* (fine arts), *Mekteb-i Ticaret* (commerce), *Mekteb-i Ziraat* (agricultural), *Mülkiye-i Baytar* (veterinary), *Mekteb-i Bahriye* (naval). The first school which can be considered to be the first Turkish university (*Dar-ül-fünun*) was opened in Istanbul in 1870 but suspended its activity within some months due to lack of teachers and financial troubles (*Dar-ül-fünun* was finally reopened as late as 1900, but up to the period of the Republic it was a school of the lower level).

⁴ Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks. The Introductory History to 1923*. Longman, London 1997, p. 295.

were taught, was the so-called *Tercüme Odası* (Translation Office, belonging to the Foreign Ministry). It was the office where European documents and official letters were translated into Turkish, but also where lessons in European languages were given to Ottoman bureaucrats. Other places where a young Ottoman could learn European languages at a high standard were: *Galatasaray Sultanisi*,⁵ the schools run by the communities of national and religious minorities (mostly in Istanbul, Izmir and Salonika), the private schools run by monks and nuns. Especially minorities' and Christian monastic orders' schools enabled the pupils to master not one or two, but three or more languages.⁶

The economic and political reforms as well as the transformations in the culture carried on during the reign of Abdülaziz (1830-1876, Ottoman sultan: 1861-1876), Murad V (1840-1904, Ottoman sultan: 1876) and Abdülhamid II (1842-1918, Ottoman sultan: 1876-1909). The last one reigned thirty three years and the period of his rule was full of very important events, both of a political and economic as well as of a cultural character. Hence some historians call his reign the "culmination of the *Tanzimat*".⁷ Though the rule of the autocratic and pathologically suspicious Abdülhamid is considered to be very controversial and is still under dispute, one must say that all important institutions, such as elementary, secondary and the higher level schools, banks, commercial companies, mail, telegraph, roads, railway, shipping companies, printing houses, hospitals, poor-houses etc., slowly but successfully developed; the culture of the West penetrated the upper classes of Ottoman society. The most brilliant technological convenience which the Ottomans of the Abdülhamid period could enjoy was the railway. During the reign of Abdülhamid railway tracks in the Empire increased threefold

⁵ One of the most famous Turkish schools, set up in 1867 by Sultan Abdülaziz, who having paid a visit to Europe in 1867 was so impressed by the French education system during the reign of Napoleon III that immediately after coming back to Turkey decided to set up a royal school of the lycée type with the French syllabus. Among the graduates of this school we can find outstanding Ottoman and republican politicians, diplomats, scholars, writers and publicists.

⁶ Though the Christian schools in the Ottoman Empire were and are reproached for their missionary activities, the major role of Christian schools in Turkey is unquestionable. It is enough just to look at the memoirs of the Turkish writer Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1866-1945), who shows in his *Kırk Yıl* what a huge precipice separated the Ottoman schools of the *riştiye* type from education in Christian and Jewish circles. The most famous Christian schools founded in Istanbul in the period of *Tanzimat* were: the American Robert College, Lycée Français Saint-Benoit, Österreichisches St. Georgs-Kolleg and the American College for Girls. The last one is especially worthy of notice as a school which had a share in the education of Ottoman girls in the 19th century. It was founded in 1876 by Congregational Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

⁷ Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977, p. 172.

and achieved a total length of 452 km.⁸ Such cities as Varna, Konstanza, Sofia, Izmir and Ankara had a railway, also the biggest project, the Baghdad Railway, was initiated. If previous sultans, searching for patterns and financial support, preferred France and England, Abdülhamid paid attention to Germany. As the Turkish historian İlber Ortaylı writes, “Germany found two fields where it could influence the Ottoman Empire. One of them was the army. The other one was modernizing the civil services and the railway.”⁹

As a result of the liberal Young Turk Revolution of 1909, Sultan Abdülhamid II was replaced by his brother Reşad (1844-1918), who would be the last but one Ottoman sultan. The Empire, called in Europe “the sick man of Europe”, was in a very poor political and economic condition; one can say that it was in a state of agony... During Sultan Reşad’s reign Turkey lost most of its remaining Balkan possessions in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and lost Tripoli to Italy (1912). During World War I Sultan Reşad sided with the Central Powers, which would constitute the final stage of the Empire’s total collapse. As it was during the numerous wars of the 19th century, during World War I Turkey had again to shelter thousands of Muslims who ran away from massacres. It was a new burden for an already bankrupted state.

Summing up the period of reforms, one must admit that Ottoman Turkey visibly changed during the period of *Tanzimat* and succeeded in state modernization. The new educational system was set up, modern roads and telegraph lines were built. Railways were constructed, a postal system was created. Up-to-date hospitals and schools began to appear. Publishing houses were established, the quantity of published books and issued newspapers rose significantly. The citizens of wealth and social prestige absorbed the instruments and works of Western music, became accustomed to the fashion of Paris (to be sure, the Ottoman women could never appear outdoors without being covered from head to foot, yet the European style of clothing became an inseparable part of the life of the Turkish upper class). During the years of *Tanzimat* numerous young Ottomans became conscious of the necessity of studying abroad, and they succeeded in realizing their dreams. The physicians, engineers, musicians, painters etc. educated in Europe became a noticeable group of Ottoman society and made a significant contribution to the idea of reforming. A considerable number of Turkish girls were educated at home by European governesses: French, English or German.

⁸ After: Tomasz Wituch, *Tureckie przemiany. Dzieje Turcji 1878-1923*. PWN, Warszawa 1980, p. 17.

⁹ İlber Ortaylı, *İkinci Abdülhamit Döneminde Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Alman Nişu- zu*. AÜ Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları No. 479, Ankara 1981, p. 45. In Ortaylı’s opinion, the field of railways was the part of economy where Ottoman dependence and subordination to Germany was the biggest. He says: “The Baghdad railway was the German passageway in the Empire” (p. 73). From 1890, Abdülhamid also tried to assemble in his royal hospital the most famous German medical professors.

2. Safiye Ünüvar and her memoirs

At the decline of the Ottoman Empire, 76 years after the issue of the edict of *Tanzimat*, a studiously educated young Ottoman girl called Safiye was proposed to take a job in the Sultan's Palace as a teacher to the children of the Sultan's family. She stayed at the Ottoman Harem for nine years (1915-1923) and published her memoirs in 1964.¹⁰ We do not know when the memoirs were written down: immediately after leaving the Palace or many years later. So, it is difficult to say whether the events remembered by Safiye and the details are accurate. One must say that the memoirs are mostly general and only some passages are full of details, such as: the names of titles and positions at the Harem, the descriptions of ceremonies, furnishings, rooms and the appearance of the Harem people. Noticed in details, these paragraphs seem to be prepared with a special care for authenticity; most likely Safiye wrote them making use of her exact and precise notes, written down when living at the Harem.

Safiye was a young girl newly graduated from *Dar-ül-muallimât*¹¹ and dreamt about studying mathematics at the university (*Dar-ül-fünun*). For those days she was a very well educated girl and she was just preparing herself for the entrance exams at the university when the proposal came from the Court. As she admits, the proposal did not delight her at first as she planned to continue her studies. She was aware of the fact that the world of the Sultan's Palace¹² was a completely different, closed world... She deliberated over this after having been told about the Sultan's offer. So, we can suppose that in general each Istanbul citizen had such a knowledge of the Palace. The huge complex of the royal family's apartments, service buildings, storehouses, stables and soldiers' barracks situated on the northern city limits, seemed to be something resembling quite a separate island, inaccessible to mortal people. It appears rather astonishing if we realize that Safiye's story concerns not the period of Mehmed the Conqueror or Suleiman the Magnificent but the years of World War I...

In Safiye's book we can find a lot of descriptions concerning the very traditional life of a Muslim family (yet one must remember that it was not a standard Muslim family but a huge crowd, mostly female, consisting of Sultan Reşad V, his four wives (Kâmares, Mihrengiz, Nazperver, Dîlîrib), his elder son Prince Ziyaeddin Efendi, Ziyaeddin's four wives (Ünsiyar, Perizad, Meleksiran, Perni-

¹⁰ Safiye Ünüvar, *Saray Hatıralarım*. Çağaloğlu Yayınevi, İstanbul 1964.

¹¹ *Dar-ül-muallimât* (Women Teachers' Training College) – the first high school for girls, opened in 1870, whose aim was to prepare modern cadres of women teachers to be employed in governmental schools for girls. A large part of the graduates of that college later became leading journalists and activists in the fields of education and feminism.

¹² When using the word "palace" (that is the translation of the Turkish *saray*), we mean not one building but the whole complex of royal buildings. In Safiye's memoirs such palaces are mentioned: *Yıldız Sarayı*, *Beşiktaş Sarayı*, *Dolmabahçe Sarayı* and many villas (*köşk*) destined for the Sultan's and his sons' wives.

hal), Sultan Reşad's six grandchildren (two boys and four girls), numerous woman slaves and some eunuchs. Also the other women, the members of the Sultan's family, stayed in his care at the Palace. Safiye mentions one of them (Saliha Sultan, the daughter of Sultan Abdülaziz) but one can suppose that there were at the Harem some other women with the title of *sultan*, probably advanced in years, who were spending the last years of their life in the privacy of the Palace complex. It is proper to add here that each woman of the royal family had her own building (*köşk*) at the complex and her own servants.

A significant part of Safiye's book tells about numerous ceremonies taking place at the Harem. They were mostly of a religious character and even secular events (such as presenting children with school diplomas) had a religious setting. Some of the finest ceremonies with the participation of many guests were: the reception at the Sultan on the occasion of the new year (of course, it was the new year according to the Muslim calendar: the beginning of the month of *Muharrem*); a little prince's circumcision; presenting the diploma to the pupil who had just finished reading the Koran (*hatim merasimi*); evening parties with traditional music and theatre. The most important religious ceremonies noticed by Safiye were: the annual ceremony of preparing gifts for the Holy Towns of Mecca and Medina (*Sürre Alayı*), visiting the relic called *hırka-i şerif*,¹³ the ceremony of putting the holy sword on (*taklid-i seyf*)¹⁴ and celebrating the holy nights (*kandil gecesi*). Ceremonies of *hırka-i şerif* and *taklid-i seyf* were very exciting not only for the Sultan and all the inhabitants of the Harem that accompanied him but also for the people of Istanbul. The ceremonies necessitated leaving the Palace, which was a very rare event both in the life of the Sultan and of the women of the Harem. It was also an excellent occasion for the Istanbul crowd to see the holy procession. The trips were made in carriages.

A special place in Safiye's book is taken up by descriptions of entertainment connected to the month of Ramadan. Safiye emphasizes the religious character of that month as well as the Harem women's relish for amusement. "In the nights of Ramadan the Palace was beautiful. As everybody fasted, the days passed in silence but with the coming of *iftar* the women of the Harem, group by group, used to leave their flats and gather in the Sultan's Palace, behind the grating that was set up in the big room. The *imam efendi* also came to the Sultan's Harem, and the

¹³ *Hırka-i şerif* (*hırka-i saadet*) – "mantle of the Prophet", the most known and prestigious relic among all the relics held in the Topkapı Palace, brought to Istanbul in 1258. The sultans frequently visited the *hırka-i şerif*. From the 18th century on, these visits held a special status with the protocol of the Ottoman state and were regularly paid on the fifteenth day of Ramadan.

¹⁴ The Holy Sword, kept in the Eyüp Mosque, the first mosque built after the Ottomans had conquered Constantinople, is one of the most famous relics in Turkey. The ceremony of the girding of the sword (*taklid-i seyf*), performed regularly by sultans, and obviously by the new sultan on succeeding the throne, was one of the most imposing Ottoman official ceremonies.

muezzins, and the *namaz* was performed. Somewhere around sixty-seventy persons gathered. On some nights the women of the Harem performed the amusement with the music of *saz*. Till the time of *sahur* the real festival lasted in the Palace. Such entertainments ended when the *tablakars* (the slaves responsible for delivering the meal) carried the meal of *sahur* in. [...] I was invited to most of these events. The cheerful women of the Harem invented various games and tried to spend the time pleasantly. The Ramadan nights of the Palace made an unforgettable impression on me."¹⁵

One of the essential entertainments relieving the monotony of Harem life was visiting other women of the Palace as well as the receiving of guests. Such visits had to be very exciting for the Harem inhabitants, if we take their life style into consideration... When going to visit, Safiye was always accompanied by a eunuch who had his duty hours that day (*nöbetçi harem ağa*), and before her visit an exact time had to be fixed by the messenger. It was impossible to come to visit any Harem woman without arranging the time, and the women used their private slaves as messengers. Also Safiye had at her disposal a slave called Piyalerû. She stayed by Safiye from her first day at the Palace. This woman together with numerous other slaves bearing the title of *kalfa* were very important persons at the Harem. They knew all the habits, orders and bans and were always ready to offer their advice and help in Harem affairs. Here we must stress that the word "slave", which has a rather negative significance, is not quite adequate for the women of the Harem. Their status and prestige were high. They were well-mannered and attentive girls and women; each of them had her own occupation and was really an expert in it. Safiye emphasizes in many parts of her memoirs that her existence at the Harem would be very difficult or even impossible without the help and friendliness of the *kalfas*.¹⁶

The women of the Harem (sultan's mother, wives, sisters, daughters), though free (i.e., not slaves), had to lead a very monotonous life. Trips beyond the limits of the Palace complex were rare and stipulated by many restrictions. Safiye, who grew up in the town, undoubtedly missed the town life very much. As her memoirs are full of laudation for the Palace life, we cannot find any expression of longing or disappointment. Yet, we cannot be sure whether she was really very glad of her nine years' stay at the Harem, or – in writing her memoirs – she wanted to express her gratitude to the Ottoman House. Safiye writes that the first opportunity to leave the Palace occurred after the diploma ceremony, when Sultan Reşad's two eldest granddaughters finished reading the Koran. The girls' mother wished them to enjoy a four-day break and Safiye decided to organize a carriage trip to the surroundings

¹⁵ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 17-18, 85.

¹⁶ It is proper to add here that the woman slaves of the Harem were considered to be very valuable candidates for marriage. Men from outside the Ottoman Court married them willingly. Having been married, the slave regained her freedom. In Safiye's book one can find a lot of words of praise regarding the women of the Court.

each day of the break. Due to these trips, the little prince and the princesses, growing up in an entirely closed environment, could see quite a different world. Right at the beginning of her stay at the Court, Safiye noticed that the Sultan's wives were fat, probably due to the lack of any exercise: "Nazperver Kadın Efendi moved up to the post of the third Sultan's wife after the death of Dürriaden Kadın Efendi. Like the other Sultan's wives, she too was fat and tall."¹⁷

Safiye's book is a precious source of information on the titles and positions existing at the Ottoman Court. Safiye mentions these terms in many parts of her book and in some paragraphs she also describes the character of the posts. For example, in the chapter on the Sultan's servants she explains: "First of all let me inform you that the women of the Palace were of various races. As far as I understood, they came to the Palace in early childhood and have lived here in a closed environment. They are honest and cordial. All the slaves I saw were Circassian. The majority of them had been brought from the country. They were wholeheartedly attached to the persons they belonged to, i.e. to the Sultan, to his sons or to the women of the royal family. The slaves of the Court were divided into various kinds: *hazinedar usta*, *kâhya usta*, *ibrikdar usta*, *kilerci usta*, *çeşniyar usta*, *çamaşırcı usta*, *kahveci usta*, *kutucu usta*. They had their own subordinate slaves. That is why I found talking about it briefly to be useful. The only wish of these *hazinedars* was to satisfy their owners. [...] *Hazinedars* were personal slaves of the Sultan, serving him all day and night. Sultan Reşad had seventeen *hazinedars*. They used to serve him by turns, in groups of four, day and night. The head of them had the title of *hazinedar usta*. Only *hazinedar usta* could sit near the Sultan and the other ones, the second *hazinedar* and the third *hazinedar*, served him. The other servants came when they were called. All *hazinedars* were knowledgeable and well-mannered. They dressed modestly and tastefully. The older *hazinedars* had their own servants who lived on the ground floor of the Dolmabahçe Palace. [...] The other slaves, with the ranks of *usta* and *kalfa*, belonged to the Sultan but carried out general service at the Palace. Each of them had her own servants, according to her position. *Hazinedar usta* whom I saw at Sultan Reşad's palace was really worthy of respect. Her solicitude for the slaves at her disposal was worth seeing. She had her own order,¹⁸ precious jewels and numerous slaves. Without her permission

¹⁷ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁸ While writing "she had her own order", Safiye surely means the order called *Kadınlara Mahsus Şefkat Nişanı* (the Benignity Order for Women) that was set up by Sultan Abdülhamid II. The period of *Tanzimat* was the time of adopting various European customs and fashions, and one of them was giving orders to meritorious people. Before the period of Europeanization it was quite a strange custom for the Ottomans and only in the 1850s did sultans begin to use this form of distinction. With time, the sultans abused this custom too much, setting up more and more new orders on any and every occasion; for instance: The Commemorative Medal of the Trip to London (Londra Ziyareti Hatıra Madalyası) instituted by Sultan Abdülaziz. Particularly in the period of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the custom of setting up medals and orders increased to the

nobody could sit by her. During the official celebrations she gave commands to all women slaves, which means that she was at the head of all of them. She had her own salary, flat, servants and in the Qurban Bairam she had her own *qurban* [i.e., sacrifice – G.Z.].”¹⁹

The other theme touched upon in Safiye’s book is education in the Harem. One can find some pages in the book concerning this theme but it seems to be too little if we realize that Safiye came into the Harem as a teacher and stayed there nine years, teaching the children from the royal family as well as all the slaves who expressed willingness to learn. A reader who expects Safiye’s book to provide him with a lot of information on education in the Harem, on having read this book will be a little disappointed. In the first pages Safiye describes her arrival at the Palace and her first meetings with the wives of Prince Ziyaeddin. During these talks the Court’s expectations and the teacher’s plans were discussed. Only one passage of the book is devoted to the description of the decisions which Safiye made during her first days at the Harem, concerning the classroom and the syllabus. Some short passages describe the ceremonies of awarding the children with a diploma and in some parts we can find Safiye’s views on the desire of the men of the royal family to learn.

Ottoman schools were very different from the schools of Europe: relatively backward and indigent. But the comparison of these poor Ottoman schools with the situation in the Harem is quite impossible. It will not be an exaggeration if we state that the education in the Harem was quite primitive and rudimentary. Before Safiye’s arrival at the Court, the slaves and the children of the royal family were taught by randomly-chosen women teachers whose only duty was to teach the Koran. Also some slaves who had learned a bit gave Koran lessons to those slaves who could not read at all. When Safiye was offered a post at Court, she was told that she would be the first teacher at the Harem with a school diploma! And also she learned why the previous teacher had been dismissed: while teaching the Koran “she was sitting on the chair and smoking cigarettes”.²⁰ We can learn that Safiye was also the first young teacher at the Harem: “In the half-open doorway I could see the heads of the inquisitive slaves (such peeping was the Harem’s custom). They were the women of the Palace who had been informed that the new teacher would come. They whispered something about me into each other’s ear. As far as I could hear they said: ‘Look! She is young, isn’t she?’ And, they were right, because until then all the teachers employed at Court were old-looking, matronly women. Naturally, they supposed that the new teacher would be the same, whereas I had only just finished *Dar-ül-muallimat* and I was a young girl.”²¹ Safiye’s first pupils were Prince Ziyaeddin’s elder children, two girls and a boy, and soon two daughters of his second

point of being ridiculous. So that some oppositional writers of that time made fun of it in their poems (after: [www.referansgazetesi.com/archiv/2809/2809kul.html], 2005).

¹⁹ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 67, 69, 70.

²⁰ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

²¹ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 9-10.

wife began their education too. Later on, also some young slave girls expressed the wish to learn and they participated in the lessons together with the princesses and the prince. As Safiye writes, they had the same duties as the children from the Sultan's family and got the same diplomas and prizes during the joint ceremonies.

The first thing Safiye ordered after coming to the Harem, was the purchase of double school desks, a blackboard, chalk and a teacher's desk. So, we can suppose, that till that time there had been no proper classroom as such in the villa of Ziyaeddin's first wife, though her children were given lessons. Only after Safiye was employed was a real classroom in the huge complex of Sultan's Palace furnished. As regards the syllabus, Safiye was informed that in the first place she should teach the Koran so that the pupils could read it. And only after achieving the skill in reading all the chapters were the pupils allowed to pass to the current school syllabus. This requirement seems to be rather archaic if we realize that in the Europe of that time little pupils used to begin their education with learning to read short, pleasant passages, especially written for children, not trying to read quite incomprehensible, and very long texts. Safiye describes her first lesson at the Harem in so many words: "It is impossible to forget the date of the day when Dürriye, Rukiye and little prince Nazım, the children of Prince Ziyaeddin and his wife Ünsiyar, began to learn: 11th May 1331 (1915). In the afternoon the princesses came to the classroom with their mother. We took our seats. At first I asked the girls which chapters of the Koran they had learnt. The elder princess had reached the surah *Yâsin*, and the other one only four chapters. I checked briefly their knowledge, as if I was examining them and I informed them that they could start from where they had reached. As far as tiny Prince Nazım was concerned, he had to start from the very beginning. The princesses had silk scarves from Bursa on their heads. In fact, in Sultan Reşad's palace everything was made of the fabric from Bursa or Hereke. It was common knowledge that the Sultan did not value foreign goods when domestic ones were available. The little prince noticed the scarves on his sisters' heads and said he also wanted to cover his head. His mother at once gave the command. The tiny prince's *fez* was brought.²² When he put it on, I could see tears of happiness in the eyes of Suzidil, his old nanny. Since that day three months passed. Our lessons proceeded. On the 6th August 1331 (1915) both princesses finished learning the Koran."²³

During her nine-year stay at the Harem, Safiye accomplished with the elder girls the syllabus of the eight-year state school. The education was continued after Sultan Reşad's death, when Prince Ziyaeddin was obliged to leave the Palace

²² *Fez* – a conical cap of red felt, men's head covering, once made only in Fez (Morocco); introduced in 1826 by the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II to replace the turban, which in the eyes of this pro-European sultan represented backwardness and conservatism (yet, a hundred years later, the pro-European president of the Republic of Turkey, Kemal Pasha Atatürk was to ban the *fez* as a symbol of conservatism and was to make everybody wear bowlers and fedoras). Opponents were executed or sentenced to imprisonment.

²³ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 24-25.

complex.²⁴ From then on the family lived in the Haydarpasha Palace and Safiye continued her teaching duties there. In 1923 Safiye invited her old school-mistress to come and examine the elder princesses. The exam went off well and this encouraged Safiye to send the girls to the state school, the Lycée of Çamlıca. It was the first case in Ottoman history when girls from the sultan's family went to the school out of the Palace. The princesses were permitted by the Ministry of Education to take part in the lessons of the last class and to take the state final examination. Unfortunately, the royal family was soon forced to leave Turkey for ever and the princesses missed the exams and the diploma ceremony.²⁵ Safiye writes about it with sorrow.

In some passages of the memoirs Safiye mentions Prince Ziyaeddin's will to learn. It can be a little astonishing but this man, being the sultan's son, in his forties still continued his education at the medical school (*Tıbbiye Mektebi*). Safiye writes (and some other memoirists of that time, e.g. Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil,²⁶ emphasize this fact) that Sultan Reşad attached great importance to his sons' education and wanted them to gain a concrete profession. As during the reign of his brother Abdülhamid, Reşad stayed for long years under house arrest and his children's education possibilities were very limited, when he himself became sultan, he wanted his sons to learn. Ziyaeddin continued his training in the hospital even after Sultan Reşad's death, when he was forced to leave the Palace. Safiye writes that the prince used to pay attention to sick, poor people in the streets. He used to give them medical advice and some money for medicine. Sometimes he encouraged seriously sick men to go to hospital for help. When Safiye's sister became ill and surgery was needed, the prince took part in the operation. "At that time there was a hospital near the Hagia Sophia Mosque. The prince personally assisted during the operation. My sister lived for seventeen years after this operation and mourned the prince deeply when he died in Egypt."²⁷

3. Conclusions

One could believe that the Ottoman Court, after the scope of modernization depicted in the first pages of this paper, would be quite a modern, Europeanized

²⁴ According to the rule of inheritance in the Ottoman Empire, after Sultan Reşad's death the throne passed to his brother, Vahdettin (the last Ottoman sultan).

²⁵ In the beginning of the Republic, the Turkish Parliament passed the *Decree no: 431*, on the grounds of which all the members of the Ottoman family, the men, the women, as well as the children, were expelled and deprived of all possessions and citizenship. Thus most of them were doomed to leading a life of misery in Western Europe. For more information on the Ottomans' exile see: Kadir Mısıroğlu, *Osmanoğulları'nın Dramı. Elli Gurbet Yılı (1924-1974)*. Sebil Yayınevi, İstanbul 1979.

²⁶ See: Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray ve Ötesi*. Özgür Yayınları, İstanbul 2003.

²⁷ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

place and a good example to be followed by people from outside the Palace. Quite an incorrect judgement! Safiye's memoirs, in spite of the writer's great reverence and admiration for the Court, show how backward the Palace was, how insignificant the influence of all historical changes on the life at the Harem. We cannot find any mention at all of the press, foreign writers' books, theatre plays, French teachers and teachers of European music. Undoubtedly, these manifestations of Europeanizing took place at the Harem. But one can suppose that they were quite rare entertainments and, what is more important, they were considered by the people of the Court to be something mean, something inappropriate. Safiye underlines in some passages of her book that the inhabitants of the Palace, the men of the royal family as well as the women – both free and slaves – were devoted supporters and advocates of Islamic and Ottoman tradition.

We can find only a few examples of new, modern, European customs, equipments, inventions etc. They are so sparse that we can summarize them in several lines. Let us list these novelties. On beginning her duties, Safiye orders that the classroom should be equipped with school desks, blackboard, chalk and teacher's desk. On visiting the first wife of Padishah, Safiye is asked to sit on a chair, not on an Oriental cushion, and she considers this to be an indication of respect. The boys and the men of the Palace prefer European style clothing. Though Safiye does not write about it, we can still learn about men's inclination and taste from some photographs attached to her book. The Sultan's son Ziyaeddin, his little son as well as the Sultan's eunuchs wear European style jackets, trousers, waistcoats and shirts. And the only Oriental part of their clothing is the *fez*. Sultan Reşad, after many years of suffering from kidney disorders, takes the decision to undergo surgery and the famous surgeon from Germany, Professor Izrael is asked to come to Istanbul to supervise the operation at the Palace. Safiye informs us that the Sultan's private doctor Orhan Bey had years before been Professor Izrael's student. As far as entertainment is concerned, we must state with regret that Safiye did not describe any European style amusements though Istanbul was in those years a town with many places of European "suspicious" entertainment as theatre, opera, operetta. We can find only two passages in which Safiye describes in a very banal way the playing of European music at the Harem: "We spent time very nicely. The princesses played on the piano 'à la Turca' and 'à la Franca'. [...] I do not find it necessary to talk about 'à la Franca' and 'à la Turca' music, as everybody knows this."²⁸ Technological inventions appear in Safiye's book only four times and these are: a yacht, a steamer, a car and the telegraph. Safiye mentions Sultan Reşad's four trips by yacht. These were three small trips within the Bosphorus and one trip to Prince Islands, where the Padishah inspected the Naval School. During one of these trips the yacht was navigated by Seyfettin Efendi, the son of the old sultan, Abdülaziz, who was fond of yachting. The steamer appears only once in Safiye's book, when she describes

²⁸ Safiye Ünüvar, *op.cit.*, p. 126, 136.

the transport of Sultan Reşad's body along the Golden Horn inlet to the Eyüp Mosque, where Padishah wished to be buried. After the funeral, the new Sultan Vahdettin went back to the Palace by car and it is the third technical invention that appears in the book. The last one is the telegraph, mentioned only twice, as the means of communication between the sultan's palaces.

The importance of Safiye's memoirs consists in the abundance of information on the Ottoman Harem in the period of the Empire's decline.²⁹ Safiye avoids themes of a political nature and concentrates on detailed descriptions of the inner world of the Harem. It was a world based on ancient tradition; a world that resisted modernization and even electricity was rejected at Sultan Reşad's Palace...³⁰

²⁹ There are only a few books concerning the theme of the Ottoman Harem because for ages it was nearly impossible for a European woman to cross the Harem's threshold (if she was not the sultan's slave!) and an Ottoman woman, who could enter the Palace more easily, did not write down her impressions. So we have only a few books on the life of the Harem, written by women themselves; e.g. Leyla Saz, *Haremin İçyüzü*. Milliyet Yayınları, İstanbul 1974; Regina Salomea z Rusieckich Pilsztynowa, *Proceder podróży i życia mego awantur*. Kraków 1957; the memoirs written by sultans' daughters and granddaughters as: Şadiye Osmanoğlu, *Hayatımın Acı ve Tatlı Günleri*. Bedir Yayınevi, İstanbul 1966; Sara Ertuğrul Korle, *Geçmiş Zaman Olur Ki*. Çağdaş Yayınları, İstanbul 1987; Ayşe Osmanoğlu, *Babam Sultan Abdülhamid*. Selçuk Yayınevi, İstanbul 1984; Hanzade Sultanefendi, *Osmanlı Hanedanı Saray Notları*. Tekin Yayınevi, İstanbul 2002.

³⁰ Safiye does not write about electricity at all but we can find abundant information on Sultan Reşad's aversion to electricity in the memoirs of another memoirist of that time (see: Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray ve Ötesi*, p. 632-633).